

# Department of Veterans Affairs

## *Former Prisoners of War (POWs)*

### **Who Are Former Prisoners of War?**

More than one-half million Americans have been captured and interned as POWs since the American Revolution. Not included in this figure are nearly 93,000 Americans who were listed as lost and never recovered.

In 1981, Congress passed Public Law 97-37 entitled "Former Prisoners of War Benefit Act." This law accomplished several things. It established an Advisory Committee on Former Prisoners of War and mandated medical and dental care. It also identified certain diagnoses as presumptive service-connected conditions for former POWs. Subsequent public laws and policy decisions by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs have added additional diagnoses to the list of presumptive conditions.

### **What Are the Presumptive Conditions for Former POWs?**

Today former POWs are generally entitled to a presumption of service-connection for eight diseases, regardless of the length of captivity, if manifested to a degree of 10 percent or more after discharge or release from active military, naval, or air service. These diseases are:

- Psychosis
- Dysthymic disorder or depressive neurosis
- Post-traumatic osteoarthritis
- Any of the Anxiety States
- Cold Injury
- Stroke and Complications
- Heart Disease and Complications
- Osteoporosis, on or after October 10, 2008, when Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is diagnosed

If a former POW was interned for 30 days or more, the following additional diseases are presumed to be service-connected:

- Avitaminosis
- Chronic Dysentery
- Helminthiasis
- Malnutrition, including associated Optic Atrophy
- Any other nutritional deficiency
- Peptic Ulcer Disease
- Beriberi
- Cirrhosis of the Liver
- Irritable Bowel Syndrome
- Pellagra and any other nutritional deficiency
- Peripheral Neuropathy, except where directly related to infectious causes
- Osteoporosis, on or after September 28, 2009

### **How Should a Former POW Apply for VA Compensation?**

Former POWs can apply for compensation for their service-connected injuries, diseases, or illnesses by completing VA Form 21-526, *Veterans Application for Compensation and/or Pension*. They can also apply online at <http://vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp/main.asp>.

## **Are There Medical Benefits for Former POWs?**

**Yes.** Additionally, the VA health care system affords priority treatment for former POWs. Those who have a service-connected disability are eligible for VA health care. This includes hospital, nursing home, and outpatient treatment. Former POWs who do not have a service-connected disability are eligible for VA hospital and nursing home care – without regard to their ability to pay. They are also eligible for outpatient care on a priority basis – second only to veterans with service-connected disabilities.

While former POWs are receiving treatment in an approved outpatient treatment program, they are eligible for needed medicines, glasses, hearing aids, or prostheses. They are also eligible for all needed dental care. There is no co-payment requirement for former POWs at VA pharmacies.

## **Are There Benefits for Survivors of Former POWs?**

**Yes.** The major benefit is Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) which is a monthly benefit payable to the surviving spouse, and/or the former POW's children and parents in some cases, when the former POW:

- was a service member who died on active duty; *or*
- died from service-related disabilities; *or*
- died on or before September 30, 1999 *and* was continuously rated totally disabled for a service connected condition (including individual unemployability) for at least 10 years immediately preceding death; *or*
- died after September 30, 1999, *and* was continuously rated totally disabled for a service-connected condition (including individual unemployability) for at least 1 year immediately preceding death.

DIC is terminated for a surviving spouse who remarries, but can be resumed if the remarriage ends in death, divorce, or annulment. However, a surviving spouse who remarries *on or after* attaining age 57, and *on or after* December 16, 2003, can continue to receive DIC.

## **Are There Other Benefits for Former POWs and Their Dependents/Survivors?**

The following are other significant VA benefits to which certain veterans may be entitled: disability pension, medical care, education and training, home loan guaranty, and burial benefits. Certain disabled veterans may be eligible for vocational rehabilitation and employment services, insurance, clothing allowance, special adapted housing assistance, and specially adapted automobile equipment. Certain dependents/survivors may be entitled to health care, death pension, education and training, home loan guaranty, and burial in a national cemetery. See other VA fact sheets on those benefits, or contact VA for more information.

## **Is Special Assistance Available to Former POWs?**

Each VA regional office has a coordinator for former POWs. Any former POW who needs special assistance should ask to speak to the Former POW Coordinator. Additional former POW information is available at <http://www.benefits.va.gov/persona/veteran-pow.asp>.

**For More Information, Call Toll-Free 1-800-827-1000  
or Visit Our Web Site at [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov).**